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THEATRE OPENINGS

"A Flag Is Born" "The Front Page"
"Yours Is My Heart"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

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NEW YORK POST NEW YORK DAILY NEWS NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"A Flag Is Born"

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

To aid the American League for a Free Palestine, Paul Muni is appearing in Ben Hecht's pageant, "A Flag Is Born," which had its second public showing at the Alvin last evening. Since the post-war fate of the Jews is only a little less harrowing than it was during the decade before the war, and since Mr. Muni's performance is acting of obvious eminence, the mixed value of Mr. Hecht's script leave this reviewer ungratefully reluctant. The cause of the Jews and the good-will of the people who have labored to mount this pageant deserve a finer script than Mr. Hecht has delivered.

The cause is the establishment of a free Palestine by force of arms against British resistance. After scribbling at random for most of the evening, Mr. Hecht gets around to the main point in the final scene, and states it with force and vigor. In addition to Mr. Muni, the other people of good-will include Kurt Weill, who has written a beautiful theatre score; Celia Adler, who acts a European refugee with insight and feeling; Quentin Reynolds, who serves as commentator; Luther Adler, who has ably managed the staging, and many others who cannot be adequately saluted in this notice.

To state the case for a Free Palestine, Mr. Hecht has written a pageant that presents two aged refugees blundering out of the charnel-house of Europe towards the land where the sun shines and the lemon trees flourish. After the fashion of pageants, which at best are untalented theatre, "A Flag Is Born" is broken by bits of history and current politics—Saul, Solomon and the United Nations.

After an hour and three quarters, Mr. Hecht manages to show that the Jews have a noble heritage, that Europe has persecuted them with a savage violence unprecedented in the whole dark history of the world, that post war politics is continuing the inhuman race war and that something decisive ought to be done about it.

Incidentally, Mr. Hecht accuses the Jews in the audience of having remained comfortably silent while Europe was murdering their brothers, but this pious charge is of doubtful accuracy; and even of it were true would be beside the point. When the bell tolls, everyone in the world is guilty.

The subject is one of colossal size. It is shot through with intricate politics. No one could cover it thoroughly in one evening. But when a great mass problem comes to the theatre, there is generally one way to make it intelligible: Tell the human aspects of it in terms of human beings.

In the first few moments of "A Flag Is Born" Mr. Hecht oggers two poignant human beings—Tevya and Zelda, man and wife, old and dispossessed, but sagacious and unbeaten. Since Mr. Muni and Miss Adler are playing the roles with genuine inspiration, Mr. Hecht starts with something that can give his mass problem the agony and grandeur of human beings.

Pageants seldom give you more than the dust of ideas, and "A Flag Is Born" is no exception. For the commentator's part, Mr. Muni has written prose poems in an intolerable tuppence-colored style; and the mirages of Biblical history and satires on politics crowd the lives of Tevya and Zelda off the stage.

In this reviewer's opinion, that is a pity. For Mr. Muni is giving one of the great performances of his career. He is always a supreme technician; he has long since mastered the language of the stage. But he is also a man of mind and understanding. Without sentimentality, without heroics he is speaking for the Jewish race with an actor's eloquence.

Mr. Muni's greatest gifts are now on view at the Alvin, and they give the playgoer a feeling of profound gratitude.

'A FLAG IS BORN.'

Play by Ben Hecht; music by Kurt Weill; staged by Luther Adler; settings by Robert Davison; costumes by John Hoyt; musical director, Isaac Van Grove; choreography by Ramira Gon; in charge of production, Jules J. Leventhal; presented by the American League for a Free Palestine at the Alvin Theater Thursday evening, September 5, 1946. The cast:

Speaker	Quentin Reynolds
Tevya	Paul Muni
Zelda	Celia Adler
David	Marlon Brando
The Singer	Mario Berini
Saul	George David Baxter
Old One	Morris Samuylow
Middle-aged One	David Manning
Young One	John Baragrey
David the King	William Allyn
Solomon	Gregory Morton
American Statesman	Jonathan Harris
Russian Statesman	Yasha Rosenthal
First English Statesman	Tom Emlyn Williams
Second English Statesman	Jefferson Coates
French Statesman	Frederick Rudin
First Soldier	Steve Hill
Second Soldier	Jonathan Harris
Third Soldier	Harold Gary

Journal and American

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

'A Flag Is Born' Premieres at Alvin Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

The showshop's every art is brought to bear on the skillfully produced, tremendously effective propaganda play the American League For a Free Palestine has put on at the Alvin. Last night, after a series of preliminary performances, the Ben Hecht scenario for peace on earth, good will toward Jews was acted out in the presence of us gentlemen of the press to whom all the world is supposed to be a stage and all the people merely players.

Viewed thus, as theatre, "A Flag Is Born" is, as I have said, skilled as to production, tremendous as to effect. Against a Goya-like background by Robert Davison, against Kurt Weill's heart-felt music, the ever-increasing impact of Ben Hecht's pro-Palestine parable rises through an hour and a half of unbroken telling to a climax of vivid, if theatrical, violence. The picture is not a happy one. But no Jew or Gentile is likely to forget it.

Which, I gather, is what Ben Hecht's American League For a Free Palestine and Ben Hecht's "A Flag Is Born" are after. Of their combined effectuality as propaganda, I, as drama critic, would not know. But their effectuality as theatre is memorable.

• • •

World's Heart

After all is said, seen and sung, "A Flag Is Born" is neither more or less than the Ben Hecht Creed for Palestine restated in the language of the showshop, a sort of dramatization of his programed belief "that the Jews are a target, disasterously visible and united; that if the Hebrew people are to survive, they need a new visibility of government and a new unity of homeland; that the Hebrew's only Parliament is—the world's heart!"

And it is the world's heart to which "A Flag Is Born" makes its on-stage plea. Not only the propaganda play itself, but everybody and everything connected with it. From Ben Hecht's American League For a Free Palestine down through Ben Hecht's dialogue to Ben Hecht's composer, director and performers, the pageant at the Alvin addresses nothing more official than the world's heart. And the world's conscience.

Are there such things? he wants to know. If the intensity with which "A Flag Is Born" was followed, if the ovation of approval which followed its curtain fall, if the emotions on the faces of the congration in 52d st. might be taken as criteria, the answer is affirmative.

• • •

Ardent Acting

In the presence of this gentleman of the press to whom all the world is supposed to be a stage and all the people merely players, the recurrent young actor whose name is Marlon Brando is the bright particular star of the Ben Hecht pageant. First in "Truckline Cafe", then in "Candida", now in "A Flag is Born," he is rapidly fulfilling the brilliant promise he made as the short-trousered Nels in the long lasting "I Remember Mama". His David is enduring in the memory.

Paul Muni gave an ardent downtown performance as the ancient Tevya, as does Celia Adler as his ancient Zelda. Mario Berini provided emotional depth and glow as The Singer. Kurt Weill was more than helpful with his never intruding music and Quentin Reynolds was effective as The Speaker, even when his speaking was merely repetition of what is better said by word and action on the lighted stage. The orchestra, beneath the baton of Rudolf Goehr, was fine....

If the Broadway stage is the proper place for propaganda, then "A Flag is Born" is undoubtedly the proper propaganda for the Broadway stage. From this theatregoer's seat, Ben Hecht and his fellow propagandists have done a high and mighty job. But, as theatre for the theatregoers, it is something else again. That something else is pure pro-Palestine propagandism!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Soapbox Pageant

BEN HECHT has written an impassioned and violent plea for a Hebrew homeland in "A Flag Is Born," which has opened for a limited engagement at the Alvin. The passion infuses interludes of eloquent and moving drama. The "call to action," which inspires a somewhat hysterical climax, has the clarion quality of a soapbox harangue. Like most propaganda in the theater, the diatribe mutes the savage and subtle insistence of Hecht's pageant of Judaism during recent terrible years. Its value as an instrument to open the doors of Palestine to Jewish refugees is not the business of this reviewer. As a show it is distinctly dubious.

• • •

The work does not lack brilliant and imaginative execution. Paul Muni, as an elderly refugee from concentration camps, gallows and lime pits in which six million Jews were sacrificed, confers great dignity on the part as he communes with ancient leaders of his race in his quest of a resting place from terror. Celia Adler brings warmth and immense feeling to the role of his dying wife and Marlon Brando is an embittered youngster who meets the elders in a Jewish graveyard. Luther Adler has directed their rather formal movements ably; Kurt Weill has composed an effective musical accompaniment to the wisps of action punctuated by successive tableaus and Robert Davison has decorated the production imaginatively.

• • •

The fact remains that the production as a whole is slipshod and rather wearisome. Hecht has mounted a rocket gun to carry his message where a single clean shot might have proved more effective. Quentin Reynolds is on hand as a narrator to explain the somewhat obvious facts about the decimation of European Jews and their present plight. Muni lectures the audience and a "Council of the Mighty," which is easily identified with a United Nations meeting. In the ending his young companion is harangued by members of Jewish underground groups, emphasizing their terroristic tactics with tommy guns. The core of drama in the spectacle gets lost in the shuffle.

• • •

That core is the best thing about "A Flag Is Born." Muni takes over a difficult and windy assignment with tremendous authority and he is competently aided in his visions of Judaism's past glories by George David Baxter, as Saul; William Allyn as King David and Gregory Morton as Solomon. Miss Adler is even more earthy and appealing. Their plea is to the heart for the most part and it is curiously successful. Hecht declaring war on the British talks more stridently from the stage, but less persuasively. His militant shouting drowns out fragments of stern and moving theater.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

'A Flag Is Born' Presented For Short Run at the Alvin

By Vernon Rice

Thursday night the American League for a Free Palestine opened a limited run of Ben Hecht's "A Flag Is Born," starring Paul Muni, at the Alvin. Last night's performance was attended by the press.

Part pageant, part documentary, part drama, the production as a whole was a heartfelt plea for the Jews of the world to awake to the plight of their people. Much love has gone into the work, much devotion and attention. Staged by Luther Adler with an eye on the mass detail that pageantry entails as well as on individual performances, there were moments that were visually and dramatically effective.

Quentin Reynolds, as narrator, set the scenes before the curtain rose on a graveyard near a road. Presently Tevya and his wife Zelda, enacted by Paul Muni and Celia Adler, wander on and the play begins. They are wanderers on their way to Palestine and they stop to rest and hold their religious services.

There they meet up with a bitterly cynical young Jewish lad, David, played by Marlon Brando. As they talk and discuss their fate and hold their services, there is a flash-back on the history of the Jewish people up to the present day, ending with a stirring call for action on Palestine. Mr. Hecht's theme is that the Jews themselves must act.

Kurt Weill provided music that heightened the proceedings considerably and the settings of Robert Davison and George Gebhardt's lighting did much to add to the dramatic values.

Paul Muni underscored his quiet playing and Celia Adler had probably the most moving and touching moment in the play as his wife remembering their one-time home life.

Marion Brando was called upon again to provide some dramatic fireworks. Tenor Mario Berini sang a religious number with warmth and sincerity.

A great many people appear during the proceedings, a few having a chance to perform individually but briefly. Many more are only a part of a group. But whether as individuals or as a group, it didn't seem to matter. The cause was the important thing.

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

'A Flag Is Born,' Hecht's Propaganda Play at Alvin, Often Theatrically Effective.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

If it's Ben Hecht's plan to write most of the plays reaching Broadway during the new drama year he is off to a good start, being represented by two of the three that have been done thus far, and the season still has nine months to go. The second play to put his name upon the houseboards is "A Flag Is Born," now at the Alvin for an engagement of four weeks.

"A Flag Is Born" is sheer propaganda—emphatic, insistent militant propaganda. It is also often good theater. There are some repetitious portions that provide heavy going during the hour and forty minutes of playing time, but for much of the way the material is ingeniously handled and there are a few moments that are genuinely stirring. There is appropriate incidental music by Kurt Weill.

The scene of Hecht's play is a graveyard. The principal characters are three wandering refugees—a wise, tired old Jew; his aged, broken, sickly wife, and a young Jew of Europe who has somehow escaped slaughter in the gas chambers and lime pits of the Nazis. These three are seeking the road to Palestine.

Flashbacks bring on Biblical scenes and characters and Tevya, the old Jew, makes his appeal to the kings of ancient Israel, such as Saul and Solomon, and finally presents his case, and that of the Hebrew refugees of the world, to a Court of Nations. The dreaming Tevya and his wife join the dead of the graveyard, but just before dying he has urged the young Jew onward. Soldiers of Palestine show David the bridge to the Holy Land as the play ends.

Paul Muni is an eloquent Tevya and is enormously persuasive in his appearance before the statesmen of the world. Marlon Brando, the young actor who was so generally acclaimed last season, is a bitter and impassioned David. Celia Adler whines pitiably as the maundering, shriveled old woman, who prefers the peace of death to going on with the struggle. Quentin Reynolds is the narrator and speaks with ease and clarity. The play is staged with use of ramps, platforms, backdrops and trick lighting, and has been directed by Luther Adler.

"A Flag Is Born," which is a crusade as well as a play, has been produced by the American League for a Free Palestine as a part of its campaign to get the Hebrew refugees of Europe into the Holy Land, the League being pledged to the establishment of a free and democratic Palestine. Leaving aside its purpose and its political implications, and considering it as a piece of theater, "A Flag Is Born" is acted well enough and has considerable intrigue and progression.

"A Flag Is Born" is played without an intermission.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

Hecht's 'A Flag Is Born' Moving Plea for Jews

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Ben Hecht has written an impassioned cry for the cause of Europe's homeless Jew in "A Flag Is Born." He blasts apathy out of its shoes with an urgent call.

He has described his pageant as propaganda. His target is indifference rather than prejudice. The condemnation is against the mute fellow of the hungry wanderer, the voice that has been silent because it was secure. And he condemns the interests which deny the Jew the haven of Palestine as his heritage.

Hecht's exhortation is hot blooded; it is too prejudiced against lingering injustice to paint its cause any color but white or its opposition anything but black.

An old Jewish couple wander into a graveyard somewhere in Europe, trying to find their way to Palestine, their land of milk and honey. They have come from the little world of the ghetto, searching for a way out of what is only "a gallows and a lime pit" for them.

Seek a Haven.

Their desires are personal, colored with philosophical perspective. The youthful David they meet is bitter, caustic and hating.

The old man in visions sees the musical service in a synagogue, and then Saul who would not compromise in the fight for a free home of Israel. Then he sees the court of Solomon, who tells him to appeal to the Mighty.

Then Tevya, the old man, appears in his dream before the United Nations.

Despite the early opposition of Britain and the antics of Russia, Palestine is flung open to the Jews. Then the entire matter is put on the agenda.

The old wife has passed away, and his distress kills the old man. Young David would kill himself, but the Jewish army of Palestine appears to him. A prophetic bridge, the visions have said, to cross is one of youth, cunning, fortitude and courage. He takes the old man's scarf as a banner and follows the army.

Muni as Old Man.

Paul Muni gives the old man an earthy dignity, and Celia Adler as his wife tops a fine performance with her recollection of the tastes and smells and friendliness of home. Marlon Brando is a sternly hopeless David whose accusations sear when his bitterness bursts out.

The staging of Luther Adler captures a weary devastation of spirit in the graveyard scenes. In contrast he has directed the pictorial visions with a covetable lushness.

Kurt Weill has written a dramatically appropriate score which speaks in emotional moods.

Some of the humor of "A Flag Is Born" may seem superimposed, some of its speeches may seem lengthy, and its burlesque of the U. N. seems flippant and casual. But Hecht has invested the pageant with enough personalized drama of a racial tragedy, so that even the blindest adversary of his cause should be theatrically moved.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 7, 1946

'A Flag Is Born' an Impassioned Drama Urging a Free Palestine

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Ben Hecht's "A Flag Is Born," at the Alvin Theatre, is a pageant drama which is angry, passionate and proud. It is, under the sponsorship of the American League for a Free Palestine, a good deal more than just a plea for a homeland for a Jewish nation; it is a demand. Mr. Hecht is against the British and wholeheartedly with the Jews who are fighting the British with guns.

The drama is at times a pamphlet put upon the stage, a radio script given the advantage of an effective visual production. A good bit of its writing is purple, but even at its gaudiest it never loses sight of the simple aim of a Palestine free for Jews. And another good bit of the writing is raw and vigorous. Mr. Hecht and all those who have worked with him have reminded a rather sleepy commercial theatre that the stage still can be a forum, a pulpit and a platform.

First among those who have worked with the author on "A Flag Is Born" is Paul Muni, whose portrayal of the eternal wandering Jew is a work of admirable quality. It has strength and it has pathos; it has humility and it has humor. And I have never before heard Muni's fine voice used to such supreme advantage.

Toward Holy Land.

The structure of the drama is simple. Muni is Tevya, an old Jew wandering helplessly, with his fragile wife, toward Palestine. Their home and children have been destroyed by the Germans, and all they know is that somewhere toward the south lies the Holy Land. They stop in a graveyard to rest, to have a bit of bread and to pray.

As old Tevya and his wife stop there, he sees great men out of his racial past—King David, King Solomon. Always he seeks the way to Palestine. He finds himself before a Court of Nations, which, after some nasty haggling on the part of Britain and a walkout by Russia, votes that Palestine should be opened to Tevya and his people. . . . And then, after the vote, the problem is put on the agenda. The Jew, says Mr. Hecht, is always on the agenda.

Tevya and his wife die there in the graveyard—but another wanderer, a young man who has shared their bread, goes on. He finds the bridge to Palestine—a bridge manned by violent, determined, armed men. On a staff he fixes old Tevya's prayer shawl, upon which is the Star of David, and thus is born a nation's flag.

Marlon Brando portrays the young man and he, too, has bitter things to say. Tevya's wife is touchingly acted by Celia Adler, and Quentin Reynolds speaks occasionally from the side of the stage as a narrator. Robert Davison's setting is pictorial and very well lighted, and Kurt Weill's music is dramatically helpful.

The profits of "A Flag Is Born," and contributions which are solicited at the theatre, will go to the American League for a Free Palestine, which declares it will use them to move Hebrews from pogrom areas in Europe to Palestine.

PM

SEPTEMBER 9, 1946

—*Kronenberger*—

A Plea For Europe's Jews

PM Reviews

A FLAG IS BORN

A Flag Is Born is a pageant; but a pageant written with purpose and anger. It is a piece of propaganda. It is a protest against the plight of Europe's homeless Jews, dreaming of a Palestine from which they are being disbarred; it is equally a plea to relieve their plight. Ben Hecht wrote it with great sincerity, and it has vigorous and pathetic moments; but I could wish it had a great many more of them.

Simply as a pageant, *A Flag Is Born* it not without color. Visions come to Mr. Hecht's tired, tottering old Jew lost, with his wife, somewhere on the road to Palestine—visions of the great Biblical days of Saul and David and Solomon with their cohorts and their concubines. As the feeble old man, Paul Muni speaks to the patriarchs with humility and dignity. But these, the most picturesque scenes in the play are also the least pertinent ones. True, they remind us that Saul and David were warriors and that Palestine once belonged to the Jews. But these scenes interpret rather than reinforce Mr. Hecht's message; they strike a mood of their own. The pathetic picture of the old couple who die on their way to the Broken-Promised Land strikes another mood. The straight propaganda strikes another mood still, of scorn for the well-heeled Jews of the world who have stayed silent that they might stay safe, of indignation toward the diplomats of the world who leave the Jews dangling "on the agenda," of anger toward the British. There is finally the heroic mood at the end, when Mr. Hecht sounds a call for militant and armed resistance.

* * *

Pageants, by their very nature, are loosely ordered affairs, one of their chief virtues being their constant shift of interest, their variety. Variety appeals in theater terms, but it can disrupt in dramatic ones, it can diffuse in propagandist ones. Each of Mr. Hecht's moods lights a little fire, and the fire of his wrath blazes up once or twice; but the evening as a whole does not ignite. The fingers never close into a fist. One is grazed by too many emotions to be mastered by any one of them. *A Flag Is Born* would have had more punch, more drive, more power to incite, had it been written out of one clenched emotion to achieve one sharp response. Where propaganda enters in, an ounce of electrifying drama can be worth a pound of assorted pageantry.

There are, to be sure, smaller things amiss with *A Flag Is Born*—speeches that are too long, writing that is too purple. But the main thing is that, while it may touch people, it will hardly shock them as it should.

The cast, which besides Mr. Muni, includes Celia Adler, Marlon Brando and Quentin Reynolds (as narrator), performs agreeably; and Kurt Weill has contributed some suitable music.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

"Yours Is My Heart"

DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

'Yours Is My Heart' Has Richard Tauber But Very Little Else

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Richard Tauber is 56, an Austrian with the shape of a penguin and the voice of a passionate dove. Women—not bobby-soxers, but women—of two continents have been swooning at the sound of his tenor for more than a quarter century, and they went limp again as the old boy sang "Yours Is My Heart Alone" last evening at the Shubert Theatre.

Tauber is a remarkable man, an artist and a skilled trickster. His lyric voice has in it the warmth of a kindlier, more pleasant era. It can be operatic in size, or diminished to the faintest crooning; it slides and slips in graceful little stunts which may be unmusicianly but are theatrically effective. It is unique.

Unhappily, the musical called "Yours Is My Heart" is uncomfortably dull and most clumsily staged. Although Franz Lehar wrote it for Tauber under the title of "The Land of Smiles" in 1928, it seems much older than 18 years—much, much older than its contemporary, "The Front Page." Alongside it, "The Student Prince" has the zip of "Of Thee I Sing" and "Blossom Time" is an "Annie Get Your Gun."

Very Old Stuff.

The plot of "Yours Is My Heart" has a Chinese prince falling in love with a French opera singer, and the French girl follows him to China and the Dowager Empress tries to bust up the romance. There is a lot of Chinese nonsense with Broadway chorus girls wearing pagodas or kimonos or something and carrying Japanese lanterns, and a couple of men have a sword dance, and it is all as old-hat as a mustache cup.

Except for Stella Andreva, who plays the opera singer and works with Tauber in the duets, the company assembled by Producer Arthur Spitz is powerless. Sammy White has some awful jokes, the best one being that Fred Keating, the magician, is the man who made vaudeville disappear. (This right after Mr. Keating, as a Chinese minister of finance, made his old bird cage disappear.) Alexander d'Arcy can't do much as a second romantic lead because there isn't anything for him to do.

The Lehar score is polite and melodious and several of the numbers besides the main song are very nice. I kept wishing, though, toward the middle of the second of three acts, that the stage manager would send the company home and let Tauber come down front and give us a repertory of those fine German and Austrian romantic songs, starting off with "Wien, Wien." And I'd have asked Miss Andreva to stay, too, because she has enough of a voice to take care of herself in duets.

'YOURS IS MY HEART.'

Operetta with music by Franz Lehar; book and lyrics by Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas, based on "Land of Smiles"; staged by Theodore Bache; scenery and costumes by H. A. Condell; lighting by Milton Lowe; musical director, George Schick; musical adaptation, Felix Guenther; dialogue direction, Monroe Manning; presented by Arthur Spitz at the Shubert Theater Thursday evening, September 5, 1946. The cast:

Guy ..... Monroe Manning
Lucille ..... Helene Whitney
Lou ..... Jane Mackie
Pierre ..... Harold Lazaron
Fernand D'Orville ..... Alexander D'Arcy
Yvonne ..... Natalye Greene
Fifi ..... Dorothy Karrol
Maria ..... Jean Heisey
Archibald Mascotte, impresario ..... Sammy White
Claudette Vernay, opera singer ..... Stella Andreva
Butler ..... Harvey Klar
Prince Sou Chong ..... Richard Tauber
Huang Wei, Chinese Ambassador ..... Edward Greag
Prince Tachang, Sou Chong's uncle ..... Arnold Spector
Hsi Fuang, Minister of Finance ..... Fred Keating
Princess Mi, Sou Chong's sister ..... Lillian Held
Master of Ceremonies ..... Albert Obregold
High Priest ..... Fred Briese
Li Tsi, Chinese bride ..... Beatrice Eden

SYNOPSIS: Time: About 1900. Act I. Drawing room of Claudette Vernay's Paris apartment. Act II. Hall in Sou Chong's Palace in Peiping, six weeks later. Act III. Room in Sou Chong's Palace, the following day.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

'Yours Is My Heart' Has Richard Tauber and a Song

By Vernon Rice

It's become an accepted fact that most operettas have bad books. Few people, however, will be prepared for the book of "Yours Is My Heart," which introduced Richard Tauber to Broadway last night at the Shubert, no matter how constant has been their operetta going.

Just in what shape it was when Mr. Tauber appeared in the musical under the title of "Land of Smiles" in England, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Holland, Belgium and South Africa, we have no way of knowing; but on New York City's 44th St. in the land of "champeen" writers of horrible, improbable and impossible operetta books, the Messrs. Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas enter "Yours Is My Heart" and come out the winners as writers of an inept story background for a musical show.

The story is completely devoid of humor and interest. It defies retelling. One could get so involved with "Now, you see it is this way" and "It's like this——" that it is unsafe to get launched on any sort of description.

He Loves She

Love seems to be the predominant factor. Prince Sou Chong, a royal son of old China, while in Paris, falls in love with a beautiful opera singer, Claudette Vernay. Well, Claudette falls in love with him, too. Then the Prince gets called back to China and she goes along.

When they get there somebody decides that the Prince can't marry Claudette right off. He has to marry someone he became engaged to at the age of 12 first and then he can marry Claudette.

Claudette doesn't think too much of the idea. What girl would? She decides she can do better in Paris, but by this time the Prince is so mad with love for her he locks her up in one of his rooms in the Palace.

Not to carry this on for the rest of the space allotted to this review, we'll kill the suspense and tell you that Claudette gets to go back to Paris, but not until 11:30 and the end of the third act.

Wrap that up with a couple of sub-plots, an unimaginative production, some acting of the old school and you've got quite an evening.

"Yours Is My Heart" has, praise be, Richard Tauber and a score by Franz Lehar, and Lehar has provided a song, "Yours Is My Heart Alone." Mr. Tauber has been told by the world at large that he has a voice of an angel, so there is little use to reiterate the statement here.

Voice Meets Song

The song "Yours Is My Heart, Alone" is just about as famous as Mr. Tauber's tenor voice and when the two got together last night, the audience almost raised the roof off the Shubert Theatre with its applause.

It called him back again and again and he sang the number in two English versions, in French, Italian and German.

Mr. Tauber, of course, plays the role of Prince Sou Chong, and Stella Andreva, with the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, the Covent Garden in London and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York behind her, has the part of Claudette Vernay, the opera singer. Miss Andreva lifts her soprano voice in solo, in duets with Mr. Tauber, and with the ensemble, and she has a very nice voice to lift.

Special mention should be made of Fred Keating, for though his part was small his spirit was merry, and he provided the few laughs the show had to offer. He was given just a few minutes to perform some of his tricks of magic, but those few minutes were quite a help.

"Yours Is My Heart" will probably have a successful stay at the Shubert, for which Arthur Spitz, the producer, should be deeply grateful to Richard Tauber and a song.

Journal-American

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

'Yours Is My Heart' At Shubert Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

This "Das Land des Lachelns" by Franz Lehar was first produced as far back as 1928. It came between the composer's "Czarevitch" and "Frederica," more than two decades after "The Merry Widow." Last night Arthur Spitz put it on display at the Shubert Theatre. Richard Tauber was the Prince Chu Chang who is entrusted with the piece's most celebrated ballad. Stella Andreva was the commoner at whom its love notes were directed.

A couple of other fellows who could be the Messrs. Shubert have long had faith in an American adaptation of "Das Land des Lachelns." So much so that they have tried it out, then tried it out again. Down East in New England under its proper designation as "The Land of Smiles," Charles Hackett was its singing star Over West in New Jersey, retitled "Prince Chu Chang," Clifford Neudahl substituted for him.

Now that "Das Land des Lachelns" has reached Broadway, its latest title is borrowed from its most celebrated ballad. Yesterday evening, hard by Shubert Alley, a big-hearted congregation found it on the disappointing side. This despite the presence of Richard Tauber, in the flesh, singing "Yours Is My Heart Alone" in English, French, Italian, German and everything but Chinese. And always in deadly earnest!

* * *

Libretitis!

Slowly and surely, however, "Das Land des Lachelns" died of book complaint. Or, as play-doctors call it, libretitis! Just as it had passed out previously in Boston and in Newark, it passed out last night here on Manhattan. As the book and lyrics of Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas grew thinner and thinner, so did the audience most hopefully assembled. Even on stage, Mr. Tauber saw small reason for keeping up the fiction.

And what a fiction! Prince Chu Chang was having himself an Occidental time in the drawing-room of Claudette Vernay's apartment in that dear Paris. Enter Huang Wei, Chinese Ambassador. China, it seems, was busting out all over with revolutions. Prince Chu Chang had better go home to his palace in Peiping where his uncle, Prince Tschang, and his Minister of Finance, an old vaudevillian, were expecting him.

So Prince Chu Chang went home, followed by Claudette Vernay, Huang Wei, an impresario called Archibald Mascotte and, as far as I could gather, the spirit of Giacomo Puccini carrying the score of "Tosca." There, in corridor and in chamber, were brides-to-be, masters-of-ceremonies, high priests, princesses and Celestial Fred Keatings. And love, love, love of the Prince whose heart belonged to La Vernay.

* * *

Wishful Thinking

Let us forget it! Instead, let us remember that Mr. Tauber sang the Franz Lehar music with skill and feeling, giving each note even more than it deserved. I forget how many thousand times he has delivered himself of "Yours Is My Heart Alone" in the course of his career. But last night, at the Shubert, he projected it as if he were projecting it for the first time and his life depended on your august approval.

Musically, everything was good enough whenever Richard Tauber and Stella Andreva got together with, say, "A Cup of China Tea," "Upon a Moonlit Night in May," "Love, What Has Given You This Magic Power" and when, alone, Claudette Vernay explained how she was "Free as Air" and that "Paris Sings Again." But there were lesser numbers entrusted to lesser people which were nothing to remember, especially "Chingo-Pingo."

Even if it hurts me more than it hurts producer Arthur Spitz, this initial Broadway transcription of "Das Land des Lachelns" was an unhappy hodge-podge of songs and dances, plots and counter-plots, gags and gadgets, in which the original Franz Lehar music was too frequently forgotten. Only when Richard Tauber stepped out of the picture, down to the footlights and lifted his voice in "Yours Is My Heart Alone" did the evening at the Shubert matter

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Tuneful Bore

A GRACIOUS Franz Lehar score and Richard Tauber's lyric tenor are pitted against a witless book and random nonsense in "Yours Is My Heart." The result at the Shubert Theater is a tuneful bore. The songs in the operetta, particularly the title number, have been well known by operetta enthusiasts for more than a decade. They appeared to better advantage on the phonograph than in the current stage production. Although Tauber enjoyed a personal triumph, with the aid of a claque, in his Broadway debut last evening, his acting stems straight from grand operatic posturing. The mise-en-scene in which he is involved helps the show not a whit.

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For Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas have fumbled through three acts of a libretto without coming up with even a fragment of regaling entertainment. They place their mildly romantic yarn in Paris and what was not known as Peiping in 1900 and have a French soubrette remark that the heroine "sure knows how to pick 'em." Her choice is a slant-eyed prince, who trundles her off to his family palace to make her his one and only during a supposed reform administration and then makes her his number two wife. The dialogue is embarrassing. The comedy is non-existent. Only the music and bits of agreeable vocalizing are worthy of attention.

• • •

Tauber's singing may not have all the dynamic dramatic quality which distinguished it some years ago, but it is a rich and controlled instrument which is forever keeping "Yours Is My Heart" from unrelieved tedium. He does the big number in four languages, with a muted and sustained rendition of the final melody which is still vastly effective. In "A Cup of China Tea" and "Upon a Moonlight Night in May" he is equally commanding. It is too bad that he is asked to engage in the wisps of action which propel the production along like a wheezy outboard motor.

• • •

Stella Andreva accompanies him in several duets and takes over the singing ensemble occasionally. While no match for the star vocally, she is quite up to him in exaggerated gestures. Fred Keating is on hand with a couple of magic tricks which you must have seen before; Alexander d'Arcy struggles with the part of a gay boulevardier and Sammy White gives up quietly as the chief comedian in the proceedings. The settings and costumes are pretty enough, but "Yours Is My Heart" has only the musical shell of an operetta. It would better decorate a concert than a theater stage.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

PM Exclusive

SEPTEMBER 8, 1946

— *Kronenberger* —

Tauber Sings In a Vacuum

PM Reviews

Broadway seems to be clamping down on minors: even the shows now have to be 18 years old. On Wednesday came *The Front Page*, and on Thursday *Yours Is My Heart*, the Lehar operetta that has been flung forth since the 20s under all sorts of titles and in all sorts of tongues. Rendered at the Shubert in something approximating English, it provided a Broadway debut for Richard Tauber in a role he has played almost everywhere else. The world-famous title song, though it will be heard as long as there is dinner music or ship's orchestras, belongs to Mr. Tauber, by virtue of both long tenure and proven talent; and Thursday night he sang it, to tumultous applause, five times in four languages. He sang it for all it is worth and for pretty much all the show is worth—for barring a couple of other Lehar tunes and Mr. Tauber's accomplished way with them, *Yours Is My Heart* is very dreary and very moldy operetta. It has a benumbing plot and an excruciating libretto, and neither of them can be sidestepped or even (with the orchestra in motion) slept through.

The unfortunate doings center in a romance between a Parisian diva and a Chinese prince; and after an act under the shadow of the Eiffel Tour, we are lugged to a palace in Peiping, where Chinese maidens pit-pat, weird dabces are the rage, august personages stand about, and quaint humorists escape torture while inflicting it. The lovers have almost as tough a time as the audience, and if the twain of East and West do meet for once, it is only at length to part. A hell of a yarn, even for operetta.

• • •

If Mr. Tauber's voice has lost some of its beauty, it has kept all its skill; and simply as singing offers something pretty uncommon for Broadway. As an impersonator of a prince in love, Mr. Tauber is hardly dashing or even brisk; indeed, his performing—and his palpable joy in it—vies at some points with Jan Kiepura's. But I much prefer it to Mr. Kiepura's, for where Mr. Tauber seems only to be saying, "I'm having a wonderful time up here," Mr. Kiepura seems always to suggest, "*You're* having a wonderful time down there." Stella Andreva sings well as the prima donna; and in *Upon a Moonlight Night in May* and *Love, What Has Given You This Magic Power?* Lehar has given the title song a pair of schmalzy handmaidens. Not too much is to be said for the rest of the score; some of it is just ripely old-fashioned, and the Chinese numbers are alarmingly cute.

With all due respect to Mr. Tauber's singing, I'm afraid that in *Yours Is My Heart* it comes too high. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

Tauber's Voice, Lehar's Music Can't Save 'Yours Is My Heart,' Stolid Show.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The melodies of Franz Lehar that are now offered in the operetta, "Yours Is My Heart," and previously sung in this country and abroad in other productions, are good ones, and Richard Tauber is a tenor who can sing them, but the new show at the Shubert is deficient on nearly all other counts. The premiere performance was given last night.

When Tauber goes it alone "Yours Is My Heart" can be a delight, but when he stops singing trouble begins. And what trouble! The company assembled by Arthur Spitz is a rather dreary one, the book provided by Ira Cobb and Karl Farkas is shockingly inept, and there were moments in last night's proceedings that were so completely old fashioned and so utterly quaint I kept waiting for Bessie McCoy to come bounding out of the wings and go into her Yama Yama dance. That would have helped, too.

Richard Tauber, if not an actor, is a singer who enjoys himself. His enjoyment is communicable, and so is his geniality. He was in fine voice last night and stopped the show and had the house in an uproar with his "Yours Is My Heart, Alone," midway in the second act. But when he finally succeeded in withdrawing the libretto took over again, dragging him and everybody else right along with it.

That libretto, if I must tell you, is enacted against Parisian and Chinese backgrounds and is all about the love between Prince Sou Chong and the alluring French prima donna, Claudette. When he is ordered to leave Paris to return to China to assume the post of Secretary of State she follows him to his palace in Peiping. Their marriage forbidden, he takes a Chinese wife so as to save the life of the fair Claudette. His next step is to make his visitor his prisoner, but along about that time most of us were hurrying away to make deadlines and I never did get to know how things came out.

Co-players with the gifted Tauber included Stella Andreva, Alexander D'Arcy, Sammy White, Lillian Held and Fred Keating, the magician, who can pull rabbits and canaries out of his sleeves. He could have done us all a service last night by making the plot disappear.

Richard Tauber is a fine singer in search of a show. He definitely deserves one. "Yours Is My Heart" isn't it.

The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

After rattling around Europe and in some parts of the United States for a number of years, Franz Lehar's "Yours Is My Heart" perked up enough courage to land squarely in the Shubert last evening. Since Richard Tauber is present in the cast to sing the memorable title song, and since some of Lehar's music is of first quality, the opening of such an antinacassar operetta raises a nice problem. Why not treat the score as good concert music and spare the theatre?

For Mr. Tauber, who is now somewhat bulky and ripened as a romantic opera hero, retains a lyric tenor voice of great beauty—eminently superior to most voices on our popular music stage. When in the second act he drops the pretention of being a devastating love swain of the Middle Kingdom and sings "Yours Is My Heart Alone" as a concert number, life seems to be very much worth while. For that is one of the great songs of the century, and Mr. Tauber has almost made it his own by the perfection and rapture of his singing. As encores last evening he sang it in four languages, the best of which in this instance is German.

There are some other songs in this Lehar score that would also adorn the concert stage—"Upon a Moonlight Night in May," which is romantic reverie, and "Love, What Has Given You This Magic Power?," which Stella Andreva and Mr. Tauber sing with conventional and appreciative grace. As a composer Lehar is admittedly old-fashioned. His music represents the luscious style that Sullivan satirized in the Savoy operas by tempering the beauty with dry wit. There is no use today in pretending that the whole score of "Yours Is My Heart" is immortal. The Chinese pastiches, in fact, are distressing. But the score contains enough songs of great loveliness to round out an excellent concert program.

There could hardly be better proof of the reactionary mood of today than the fact that the theatre of 1946 blandly sits down to a hackneyed musical play like "Yours Is May Heart." Granted that the books are likely to be stupid in most musical plays, we do not need to go through all the stencils again that are strewn through the current libretto. Believe it or not, "Yours Is My Heart" opens with a twilight tableau in Paris, the Eiffel Tower wanly gleaming in the background; and before you know it the dancing girls are giggling with their suitors, and the entrances are built up high. "Is Claudette here yet?" someone inquires expectantly.

You can bet that she is not here yet. She is not here until the butler shouts with the great news of the evening: "Madame has arrived!" and the joy is tremendous. But that is nothing to the obsequiousness of the butler when the portly form of Prince Sou Chong looms up in the wings. "Oh, Your Highness!" he croons with a sort of decent and reticent passion. "I will announce you immediately."

None of this dilly-dallying when the big pot appears.

That is the kind of tarnished valentine they have dropped on the stage of the Shubert. And when the grand passion moves from Paris to China, sometime previous to the Kuomintang revolution, the coyness of the performance is practically unendurable. What passes for dancing in the fabulous Middle Kingdom, merits a sharp rebuke from the Chinese Consul General. One can only sympathize with actors who have to pretend that they are muscle-bound or afflicted with the jitters to simulate Chinese court attendants.

Thank heavens for a few tricks by Fred Keating, as Hsi Fueng, who doubles in vaudeville magic; and thank Sammy White for trying to be funny as a low-class comic impressario. There is a good, polite orchestra, conducted with taste by George Schick. Some other people have done their best to earn an honest dollar by bringing "Yours Is My Heart" to the stage appreciately. But all that is worth while in this production could be presented in half an hour by Richard Tauber on the concert stage. The rest of it is reactionary and counter-revolutionary.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 6, 1946

'Yours Is My Heart' Dull But for Tauber

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If last night's audience is any criterion, Richard Tauber better take a long breath every time he steps on the stage in "Yours Is My Heart." He is not likely to get back in the wings until he has sung over and over again the songs of this Lehar score with which he has so long been associated.

His is great operetta artistry. If his voice has not the wild ring it once had, the resonance, the dramatic variety and the authoritative use of it are as superb as ever.

Tauber can suspend a spider-web pianissimo that is more secure than the loudest bellow of a Kiepura. He can sing in a truly florid style without bruising musical taste. His attacks on encores are so resourceful that no second hearing of a number seems repetitive.

Repeated Encores.

When he sang "Yours Is My Heart Alone" last night the audience was not satisfied until he had done the number five times in different languages and different style.

It would be unfair to suggest that the audience's enthusiasm for the star was in any way due to the supreme dullness of the proceedings in his absence. But aside from Stella Andreva's singing and a most capable orchestra, there would be little here to compete with the prominence of a much lesser artist than Tauber.

Miss Andreva achieves an intimate vocal balance with the star in their duets. She has a clear soprano which she uses effortlessly. To her credit is her lack of self consciousness over a series of awkwardly planned exits and entrances in the first act, and several costumes of ingeniously unbecoming color later on.

This operetta never did have more than a limping story, and the present adaptation is no crutch. It concerns a Chinese prince's love affair with a French prima donna. She follows him home when affairs of state call.

Story of Operetta.

His offended countrymen force him to marry a local girl to save his love's life, with the proviso that he can marry her morganatically anyway. She thinks this barbaric and would leave, but the prince imprisons her in a sort of Coney Island version of a sing song house.

When she tries to escape he relents and lets her go. Similarly he breaks up his sister's romance with a European who has followed the prima donna.

Through this Mr. Tauber manages a certain emotional stature by comporting himself with Oriental restraint. Miss Andreva is called on to express the usual gaiety, passion and rage of light opera which she does gracefully enough.

Lillian Held is sprightly as the prince's sister. Some of her lyrics are the silliest things heard in public since the little fishes swam over the dam.

Alexander D'Arcy makes a personable lothario, and cannot be blamed if he looks as embarrassed on occasion as if he had walked onto the wrong stage.

But Little Else.

Sammy White is as ever an indefatigable comedian, punching his uninspired lines with spirit. It is only in the last belated act that he gets a chance to cut loose with his loose limbed dancing.

Fred Keating appears as a Chinese minister, but his real purpose is to spring some of his magic tricks.

The scenery awarded this production is busier than it is impressive. The costumes, with the exception of some amusing patched coolie suits and a white gown for Miss Andreva, are neither beautiful nor inventive. The dances are a bore.

George Schick leads the orchestra in a rendition of Lehar's score that is deeply appreciative of its spirit.

"Yours Is My Heart" is a Tauber evening, which is what it should be and what knowing audiences will expect. If the performance's length is now due to his encores, they should be the last elements sacrificed to tightening.

The star's music needs no bolstering, but he is great enough to deserve more support from the production.

"The Front Page"

The Sun

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

'The Front Page,' Revived at the Royale, Has Lost a Lot of Magic in Eighteen Years.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

There didn't seem to be a new play handy for the season's opening so Broadway turned to an old one—"The Front Page," that detonating 1928 mixture of comedy, melodrama and vehement horseplay, written by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, and now brought forth by Hunt Stromberg Jr. and Thomas Spengler. The town's well-rested and drama-hungry playgoers turned up last night at the Royale to receive it.

The Hecht-MacArthur recital of the humors and the whims, the absurdities and vulgarities of the group of undisciplined and mutinous rogues who inhabit the press room of the Criminal Courts Building in Chicago, is now somewhat worn. It still has a lot of gusto, it remains a hard-hitting and derisive piece of theater, but it is hardly the hilarious entertainment that it was eighteen years ago.

The melodramatic portions are still exciting—the climax of the first act, which brings about the escape of the condemned man, is as tingling as ever—but the comedy often falls rather flat. The vagaries of the press room knaves don't seem as funny as they once were. And the drive of that unerring actor, the late Osgood Perkins, is greatly missed, particularly in the third act.

Charles MacArthur, taking over the task that was George S. Kaufman's in the original production, has directed the play with an eye to getting in all the detail and the frenzy, the raucousness and irreverence, and to maintaining a nightmarish pace. The young producers have provided a generally competent cast and have given the play a neat production, but the sustained crackle isn't there any more.

Lew Parker, from out of the song and dance theater, gives a vigorous and engaging performance as the bounding Hildy Johnson, the Herald-Examiner star reporter who is walking out on the newspaper racket for marriage and the advertising business. He is considerably more successful with the role that was Lee Tracy's than Arnold Moss is with the character of the ruthless managing editor, an acrid and memorable figure in the hands of Osgood Perkins. You will have a better time in seeing this new version of "The Front Page" if you never saw the team of Tracy and Perkins at work.

Olive Deering is now the tart, Mollie Molloy, and she is tremendously fiery and vivid in her playing. There are amusing performances from William Lynn as the Sheriff, Edward H. Robins as the Mayor, Benny Baker as the City News man and the ever recurrent Harold Grau as the fellow who ambles in with the murderer's reprieve. Nat Karson has contributed a good setting.

There is still considerable explosiveness and also some fun, in the 1946 production of "The Front Page," one of the wonder plays of the twenties, along with "Broadway," "What Price Glory" and "Rain." But a lot of the lunacy of the Hecht-MacArthur play has vanished, some of its magic is gone and a lot of its life, too.

'THE FRONT PAGE.'

Play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur; staged by MacArthur; setting by Nat Karson; costumes by Irene Aronson; presented by Hunt Stromberg Jr. and Thomas Spengler at the Royale Theater Wednesday, September 4, 1946. The cast:

Wilson, American ..... Roger Clark
Endicott, Post ..... Jack Arnold
Murphy, Journal ..... Bruce MacFarlane
McCue, City News Bureau ..... Benny Baker
Schwartz, Daily News ..... Ray Walston
Kruger, Journal of Commerce ..... Pat Harrington
Bensinger, Tribune ..... Rolly Beck
Mrs. Schlosser ..... Isabel Bonner
"Woodenshoes" Eichorn ..... Curtis Karpe
Diamond Louie ..... Joseph De Santis
Hildy Johnson, Herald-Examiner ..... Lew Parker
Jennie ..... Waesche Lytell
Mollie Malloy ..... Olive Deering
Sheriff Hartman ..... William Lynn
Peggy Grant ..... Pat McCarney
Mrs. Grant ..... Cora Witherspoon
The Mayor ..... Edward H. Robins
Mr. Pincus ..... Harold Grau
Earl Williams ..... George Lyons
Walter Burns ..... Arnold Moss
Tony ..... Leonard Yerr
Carl ..... Fred Bemis
Frank ..... Vic Whitlock
Policemen, citizens, hangmen, &c.

New York Post

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

'The Front Page' Revived With Rowdy Reverence

By Vernon Rice

That classic about the news men, that newspaper play which should have ended all newspaper plays but didn't, the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur melodrama of a bygone era, "The Front Page," was revived last night at the Royale by Hunt Stromberg Jr. and Thomas Spengler, with rowdy reverence and jet-propelled speed.

Eighteen years ago it began a new season, when Jed Harris opened it at the old Times Square under the direction of George S. Kaufman with the late Osgood Perkins as the managing editor, Walter Burns, and Lee Tracy, playing the crack reporter, Hildy Johnson. It ran for 276 performances.

There were other now familiar names in that original cast. Allen Jenkins, Joseph Calleia, Eduardo Ciannelli, Dorothy Stickney, Frances Fuller and George Barbier were some of them. Look westward toward Hollywood for most of their whereabouts today.

The Stromberg-Spengler production, which starts the 1946-47 season off with a breeze blue with realistic and ribald language, has a cast, many of whom are familiar both to Broadway and to Hollywood. Arnold Moss is now playing Walter Burns and Lew Parker, abandoning musical comedy, has the role of Hildy. Benny Baker, Cora Witherspoon, Olive Deering, Bruce MacFarlane, William Lynn and Pat Harrington are among many others who appear in the show.

People Will Say

There will be those who will say that a lot has happened since "The Front Page" was first presented on that August night in 1928, and that the newspaper business is no longer like that now that the gentlemen of the press have really become gentlemen of the press. Could be. A City Room, however, is still a City Room, a Press Room in a Criminal Courts Building is still a Press Room in a Criminal Courts Building and 18 years doesn't change human nature as much as it should. There will always be Hildy Johnsons and Walter Burnses (We don't mean you, Boss) as long as there is printer's ink and newsprint on which to put it.

The playwrights have left the play in the setting and era in which they wrote it and have made no attempt to bring it up to date in any way except to change a phrase or two.

There is flavor of the '20s in language not unfamiliar to the '40s. Racketeers have given way to the black marketeers and interest in local hangings has shifted to those of more international scope, but there is enough universality in "The Front Page" to make it sturdy enough for another revival 18 years from now.

A New Generation

A new generation of play-goers has come into being since the comedy's first production, who won't be haunted by the performances of Perkins and Tracy, so that it will get the full enjoyment from the ones turned in by Moss and Parker.

Moss may not be a Managing Editor, but he is a darned good actor being a Managing Editor, so not too much is lost. Lew Parker's Hildy is brash, sentimental and tough and that's how the playwrights intended him.

Mentioning other good performances would almost necessitate having a roll call of the large cast. Roger Clark, Jack Arnold, Bruce MacFarlane, Benny Baker, Ray Walston, Pat Harrington and Rolly Beck, played the reporters as though they were reared in the profession. Olive Deering has effective moments as Mollie Malloy, the prostitute. Cora Witherspoon, as Hildy's future mother-in-law; William Lynn playing Sheriff Hartman; George Lyons in the role of Earl Williams, the convict about to be hanged, and Edward H. Robins playing the Mayor—all had time to shine.

Co-author MacArthur directed the piece more for sound than sight and Nat Karson designed a Press Room which looked as though he had spent some time in one.

"The Front Page" could have only been written by good newspaper men and good playwrights. After reminding us of what they are really capable of doing, Hecht and MacArthur should be made to go and stand in a corner each night at the Booth, where "Swan Song" is playing, for a half hour before curtain. Shame on you, boys!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

By HOWARD BARNES

Out of the Files

A ROISTERING revival of "The Front Page" has ushered in a new season with considerable eclat and stage excitement. The Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur chronicle of Chicago newspaper reporting in the turbulent twenties wears its age becomingly at the Royale Theater. It is still a neat mixture of raucous wisecracks, violent doings and preposterous trivia. If they seem less urgently entertaining than they did eighteen years ago, it is chiefly the fault of the new production. While the material of a notable comic melodrama stands up, the pace has slackened and the performances are blurred. The old wine retains its bouquet, but the rebottling is not inspired.

• • •

It is neither just nor humanly possible to compare a latter day theatrical reaction with the original production after nearly a score of years. Memory is fugitive and nostalgia can play funny tricks. There are certain to be those who will sorely miss Osgood Perkins and Lee Tracy in the leading roles. Arnold Moss conceives a sound characterization of the managing editor who would double-cross his mother for a scoop on a jail-break, but one might wish for a more nervously taut Walter Burns. Lew Parker does better in realizing the role of Hildy Johnson, torn between marriage and security and the bedlam of the press room in the criminal courts building. The lesser parts are played, at best, unevenly.

• • •

"The Front Page" is too tightly written a show for ups and downs in projection. The Royale offering has strident crescendos as an escaped murderer, a Clark Street tart and a venal mayor and sheriff tangle with the skeptical recorders of fires, killings and what are known as human interest stories. What is wanting is the sustained dramatic rhythm which would have given the curtains suspense and authority. MacArthur, in his staging, makes the most of the wonderful final line in the piece, but he lets it stutter on more than one occasion. When the boys who cover criminal courts are not intent on page one news, they are more often dull than sardonically delightful.

• • •

There are good actors and actresses in a number of parts. There are enough of them to rekindle the pervasive prankishness of the work on more than one occasion. Pat Harrington, Benny Baker and Bruce MacFarlane are generally fine as Hildy's competitors. Olive Deering does a nice job as the stray who alone cares for a guy who is about to be hanged, while Cora Witherspoon and William Lynn caricature their respective roles of imminent mother-in-law and blundering sheriff satisfactorily. There is still a lot of life in "The Front Page," but there might have been more.

Journal American

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

'Front Page' Revived At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Hunt Stromberg, Jr., the youthful impresario who had a hand in bringing "The Red Mill" back to Broadway, in cahoots with Thomas Spengler, the rich young Southerner who managed to rise from the classrooms of Yale to the chorus of "The Red Mill," revived the fabulous "Front Page" last night at the Royale. It was the season's opening, really, so all and sundry were on tap to give the reproduction a nice nostalgic welcome.

Frankly, the nostalgia was not necessary. In its resuscitation the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur classic is capable of standing on its own. Admitting, with equal frankness, that newspaper offices, newspaper editors and newspaper men no longer behave that way, admitting, once again, that perhaps they never did, "The Front Page" remains a tough, tense and tender comedy about "the second eldest profession in the world."

And Mr. Stromberg and Mr. Spengler have given it a right-minded reproduction with Arnold Moss, rescued from "The Tempest," and Lew Parker, rescued from "Are You With It?" in the leading roles; with Charles MacArthur in charge of the direction, with Nat Karson in charge of the single setting. Apart from some anachronous confusion as to the time in which the action is transpiring, the replica is authentic...

Okay! I know that Harold Ickes was the big fixer around Chicago in those pre-Newspaper Guild days.

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Say That Again

Reproving it for being "brazenly profane," Burns Mantle places "The Front Page" fifth among his ten best plays of 1928-1929. Ahead of it are "Journey's End" and "Street Scene," "Wings Over Europe" and "Holiday." He admits, however, that the play's reviewers were mostly enthusiastic, shouting severally on Aug. 15, 1928, that here was the first real newspaper drama they had ever seen. The public endorsed their enthusiasm.

Well, "The Front Page," after eighteen intervening years, is still brazenly profane and, unless I am misguided, the play's reviewers will again be mostly enthusiastic, shouting severally on Sept. 5, 1946, that here is the first real newspaper drama ever to be written. It is, too! Especially to us Fourth Estaters who began at the top as leg-men and worked our way down to the bottom as critics of the drama.

Which is to say that the curricular and extra-curricular adventures of Hildy Johnson of the Chicago Herald-Examiner, and of Walter Burns, his managing editor, maintain their fabled interest, excitement and sadistic humor. You hate these pitiless pressmen, even as you love them. And, knowing the piece's famous tagline three acts before its words are spoken, you wait for it throughout an evening replete with gasps and guffaws.

For a season promising revivals and more revivals, this Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur "The Front Page" is a heartening beginning.

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Men Are Best

In the cast returning "The Front Page" to Broadway, the men are superior to the women. Which, when I come to think of it, is the way the tough, tense and tender comedy is written. Now, as in 1928, the female of the species is less lively than the male in the Press Room of the Criminal Courts Building in Chicago. And by "lively" I mean alive. Jennie and Mollie, Peggy and Mrs. Grant remain, for the most part, mere outsiders.

But in the knowing make-believe of Roger Clark, Jack Arnold, Bruce MacFarlane, Benny Baker, Ray Walston, Pat Harrington and Rolly Beck, the boys in the press room are the ink-stained Mr. Warrens the authors ordered. Even more so is the Hildy Johnson of Lew Parker, playing his first part in what programs refer to as "a play unembellished with music." Broadway has seen him in "Are You With It?" Main Street in "Hellzapoppin."

As Walter Burns, Hildy's managing editor, Arnold Moss is less successful. He is good, all right. But he is not quite to the manner born. Benny Baker, William Lynn and Bruce MacFarlane are impressively present as representatives of the City News Bureau, the Sheriff's Office and the Journal. When the women come to be considered, I like the Jennie of Blanche Lytell the most, the Mrs. Grant of Cora Witherspoon the least...

So here again is "The Front Page," the first, the last and the best newspaper drama I have ever seen.

New York World-Telegram

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

'Front Page' Slightly Dated but Exciting

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The current revival of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's "The Front Page" shows the signs of a couple of decades wear and tear. The brittle irreverence and the sparkling explosiveness one remembers seem to have given way to uproar and false excitement.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons for this lack of luster is the fertility of the play as a source. Its mood and setting and devices have inspired hundreds of lesser works on the stage and screen. The copies have bled glitter out of the original.

For all its familiarity, "The Front Page" remains an ingeniously devised play. It is neat, it has pace and humor, and it has great flavor.

It is the story of a newspaper reporter whose work is a disease with him. He is about to quit, get into another business, leave town and marry. But the instinct to get a story is too much for him.

"The Front Page" is written about the Twenties in Chicago. It concerns an era of ruthless competition in journalism, when devious trickery and unprincipled ethics were the order of the day. The reporters are men with lazy, careless exteriors, profane, sneering and complaining. They live for the excitement of the unpredictable moment when a real story breaks.

Lead Well Played.

Some of the best moments of the play are those which delineate this scornful, proud, hard hitting group. Their slang and their profanity sometimes sound dated, but their attitudes are real and their personalities are provocative.

Lew Parker, as the reporter, Hildy Johnson, gives the performance vitality. He makes Hildy vigorous and likable, playing fast and straight with none of the clowning of his musical comedy career.

Arnold Moss makes the editor suave and deceitful, a man with calculation behind every phrase he utters and capable of unchecked rage. Both he and Parker, perhaps from opening night nervousness, are occasionally inclined to read lines with more attention to speed and volume than ideas.

As the hypocritical sheriff, William Lynn draws effortless comedy from his lines and presents as three dimensional a character as there is in the performance.

In an evening prevaded by an air of unreality, Olive Deering, as a streetwalker who befriends the condemned man, plays her brief emotional scenes with gripping conviction. It is a good part, serious and tempestuous in a zany atmosphere, and Miss Deering makes the most of it.

Good Supporting Cast.

The reporters keep the play colorful, particularly Benny Baker as a cutting representative of a news bureau, Pat Harrington as a wilted skeptic, Bruce MacFarlane as a cynic with a vindictive tongue, and Rolly Beck as a prissy hypochondriac.

Cora Witherspoon makes a couple of telling appearances as the reporter's future mother-in-law, and Pat McClarney is believable as the hopeful bride.

Nat Karson has provided the play with a realistic setting, shabby and usable, its walls perked up with chubby nudes.

Mr. MacArthur directed the play, and keeps his characters on the go at a deft rate.

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DAILY NEWS

SEPTEMBER 5, 1946

An Affectionate Revival Is Given A One-Time Hit, 'The Front Page'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Either "The Front Page" is showing its age or I am. I hope it is I; I hope that today's playgoers will find in it the frenzy and the humor it once held for me, for last night's revival of the Hecht-MacArthur comedy melodrama is a good job. The players are picturesque and competent, the lines are unchanged except for negligible trifles and the action is feverish.

It must be I, for, on paper, "The Front Page" is no different from what it was eighteen years ago. Eighteen years ago, toward the end of a well-spent youth, there was excitement. There were speakeasies—wonderful places where you could get all the good food you wanted and better liquor than they serve nowadays. There were murderers and gangsters; there was Chicago, the home of the mobs. Even in New York the newspaper business seemed electric and lusty, for I wasn't going around pretending to be a gentleman. And "The Front Page" was a nerve-tingling wow, with a third-act line ("The son of a bitch stole my watch") whose audacity and devilish ingenuity caused shrieks and titters.

A Loving Production.

It is all here again, this "Front Page." Hunt Stromberg Jr. and Thomas Spengler presented it last evening at the Royale after loving preparation. Charles MacArthur has directed it, aiming for and just about getting the pace driven by George S. Kaufman in the original—a pace like that of a harness horse, crisp and quick and unfaltering. The actors have given it a good deal of talent.

Today's showgoer must know the play, for since its initial Broadway success it has become two films—one under the original title, the other called "His Girl Friday." It is a story of the press room of the Criminal Courts Building in Chicago; of the intense rivalry between raffish reporters; of an escaped murderer, a dumb sheriff and a pompous mayor; of a star reporter and his hellishly heartless boss, a managing editor.

Among the players of last evening, I think Arnold Moss, as the managing editor, is best—but not far behind is Lew Parker, a musical-show and vaudeville comedian, essaying his first straight role as the star reporter. These two preserve the tang and bite of the script, and Moss maintains an amusing elegance.

Excellent Company.

A good many others score individually, too—William Lynn as the sheriff, Olive Deering as the prostitute with a sense of human decency, Rolly Beck as the hypochondriac Tribune man and Pat Harrington as a tired journalist among them. The opening moments are, as always, as good a job of setting tempo and characterization as any authors and director could hope for, with their babble of cross-talk and their callous jokes.

Of course, newspaper work isn't like "The Front Page" any more, with guys jiggling phone hooks every thirty seconds and saying "Gimme the desk." And it wasn't, either, eighteen years ago. At that time the authors—each nearing the end of a well-spent youth—said their play was a valentine to the salad days when they were Chicago reporters.

"The Front Page" is a valentine now for me. It is exciting now only at moments, and not continuously. Obviously, some s o b has stolen my youth.